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## **Annual Conference at NSWC Port Hueneme is Positive Forum for International Vertical Launching System Users**

PORT HUENEME, Calif. - Bringing U.S. Navy allies together to share common experiences related to the MK 41 Vertical Launching System (VLS) equipment is what this conference is all about. For the ninth consecutive year, international users of the VLS system have come together for the Foreign Military Sales VLS Users Conference to exchange issues, problems, lessons learned, and future concepts related to operating and maintaining the system. And, once again, Port Hueneme was the location of choice for the May 3-5 meeting.

"This conference is a great way to exchange technical information from all VLS users," stated Ulrich "Uli" Nitsche, German Navy Technical Liaison Officer. "It is really important for all of us to discuss the problems we encounter and to find ways to resolve them." He explained that most of the German Navy problems center around the VLS canisters and he found that other users from other countries have experienced the same issues. "Getting input from other users is very valuable," he commented.

Conference participants represented ten countries: Germany, The Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand, Turkey, Norway, Japan, Canada, and the United States. During the meeting, each country was afforded the opportunity to present problems and successes, issues to discuss, questions to be answered and ideas for improvement. The conference provided an excellent opportunity for the international VLS community to communicate with one another on an informal basis.

"This is the first time I am attending this conference and I see how the synergy builds between the countries' representatives," said Nitsche. "It is very interesting and important to get to know each other and have this open communication forum."

The location of Port Hueneme as the meeting site has contributed greatly to the success and credibility of the conference. Representatives have access to the latest technology and can confer with resident Port Hueneme in-service engineering agents and logistics experts.

Lt. Cmdr. Tatsuhiko Ito, Japanese Technical Liaison Officer in Washington, D.C., had this to say about the local expertise: "It is helpful to be here with the local in-service engineering agents because they provide valuable information that I can take back with me. I especially want information on maintenance, logistics and future ideas and concepts."

As a first time attendee, Ito also agreed that the convening of international users is vitally important. "I would recommend coming back again because the information that you get here from all the user countries is very beneficial for the successful operation of the MK 41."

Some of the topics presented at this year's event included: launcher and canister issues, diminishing manufacturing sources, VLS handling equipment, missile firing support, training, cell and uptake hatch overhaul, interactive multi-media instruction, ordnance alterations, material condition review/pre-overhaul test and inspection procedures, and VLS advanced technicians.

Topics are tailored to address the requirements of the foreign military fleet since most international customers use different configurations and baselines than the U.S. fleet.

Gerald Stutts, MK 41 VLS Project Manager at NSWC Port Hueneme and conference coordinator, was pleased with the results of the meeting. He said, "This annual conference enables the United States VLS support community and specifically NSWC Port Hueneme, as the In-Service Engineering Agent, to understand exactly how issues directly impact individual countries. This understanding and collaboration with the countries allows for the development of systemic, specific solutions based on each country's unique requirements. Meeting with participants from all the countries allows for synergy in the solution implementation, which benefits the FMS users as well as the U.S. Navy. We thank all the countries for committing scarce resources to attend and for their full and active participation."